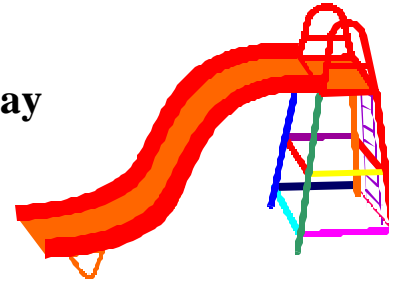


A Letter to Parents on Outdoor Play



What We Do and Why

Outdoor play is an important part of our curriculum. When the children are outdoors, they like to run, jump, swing, climb, and use all the large muscles in their bodies. They need space to work out and let off steam. They can race around, breathe the fresh air, look at the clouds, or catch a ball or a bug. They not only satisfy their physical needs for large muscle activity but also develop a sense of wonder about the miracles that take place in nature.

When we take the children outdoors at school, we talk about the things we can see, hear, touch, and feel so that the children become aware of changes in the weather and the seasons, the growth of plants, and animals. We help the children notice changes by asking them what is different about the trees, the caterpillars, or the sky. They lie on the ground and look up, or they climb the jungle gym and look down. We point out the many kinds of birds that fly overhead, butterflies, mosquitos, milkweed seeds, falling leaves, and rain as it begins. We wonder aloud where all these things come from.

By playing outdoors, your child can learn the following:

- To notice changes in nature
- To discover what happens to people, animals, and plants when it is cold, hot, dark, or light, outside
- To use his or her body in increasingly skillful ways
- To be a good observer

When the children play outdoors, we encourage them to talk about what they are doing. For example, we might say:

- “What happened to the sun just now? I don’t see it any more.”
- “What is making the trees bend over the way they are today?”

We also ask questions that help children extend their thinking as they play outdoors. For examples, we might say:

- “What happened to the water in this pan? It’s hard now. What do we need to do to make it pour?”
- “If you keep digging your hole, how far down can you go?”

What You Can Do At Home

You can provide wooden boxes and boards for playhouses or an obstacle course; gardening tools to dig, plant, and cultivate a little garden; a big paintbrush and a pail of water to “paint” walls or fences; large balls to kick or throw; or old blankets or sheets to make a tent. You can take a walk around the block with your child and talk about all the different colors of cars that pass by. Your child will take great pleasure in collecting rocks, finding bugs, watching birds and airplanes in the sky, or pretending to go camping.

You can try some of these ideas with your child outdoors to home or on a trip to the park, the beach, the woods, or wherever you can find a place to run. Playing outdoors is fun from parents and children and enhances children’s learning in many important ways.